

THE LINCOLN FARM

Present Site of the Worcester State Teachers College

Read before the Worcester Historical Society by

Dr. Albert Farnsworth, May 8, 1942

"These local annals are full of little things; names, dates, and facts; and rumors of every sort, which seem at first sight almost too trifling to be noticed, and yet, not only is it true that the general historian must essentially depend on the local, to a very considerable extent, for the mass of loose seeds from which the spirit of his narrative should be laboriously distilled; but it is also true that there is always a good deal of that spirit already made in such materials at his hand. They are full of rich meaning. They are graphic and characteristic in a high degree. They suggest far more than they say. They illustrate classes of men and ages of time. They are small but brilliant lights on the walls of the past, pouring floods of splendor from their little niches in the vast abysses around them."¹

These local annals, these little things, these facts and names and dates; this groping through the dark corridors of the past may indeed seem trifling. But it is from the threads of local history that the larger pattern of national history is woven. This then is the spirit of the history of the site of the Worcester State Teachers College. These loose threads have been gathered from early Worcester newspapers, genealogies, school board records; from the fragile yet tenuous memories of aged men and women, from faded deeds and from surveyors' plots.

The first ingredient in the spirit of this narrative tastes of salt and smells of pure mountain air. Ages ago all New England lay deep beneath the sea. Vast geological periods elapsed before land appeared. In the course of time mountains of Alpine height and grandeur covered most of what is now New England. Gradually the ice, snow and rain wore away these mountains until only their stumps remain, leaving such landmarks as Mt. Wachusett and Asnebumskit, to recall their former magnificence. In the muck of sea bottom the rich soil of the Lincoln Farm, present site of the State Teachers College, was created.

¹*American Quarterly Review*, June, 1886.

Time rolled on. Some twenty-five thousand years ago the ice sheet descended upon New England and all the land was buried beneath vast fields of ice. It endured for a long time even moving over the surface of the land, grinding the rocks beneath it. Through the ages the rains fell upon the glacier; the sun melted it. Rock shod, the retreating glacier pushed huge boulders along its bottom and served as a mighty agency in transforming the land. It remade mountains, plateaus, plains, valleys, and hills. Every hill and valley, every bed of clay and bank of sand, every boulder and rounded pebble of Worcester, every river and lake, records the story of countless centuries of change wrought by the great hands of nature. The rolling character of the Lincoln Farm was created by the retreating Labrador Ice Sheet.

The beautiful hills among which Worcester nestles mask the fact that central Massachusetts is a plateau, with a general height of one thousand to eleven hundred feet above sea level. On the west it is bounded by the Wilbraham Mountains and Pelham Hills; on the east by an imaginary line passing through Westboro, Northboro, Leominster, Lunenburg, and Townsend. The Lincoln Farm was located near the eastern boundary of the central Massachusetts plateau.

The primeval forces of nature and generations of animal and human energy created for the Lincoln Farm a situation of great natural beauty, mingled valleys and hills, meadows and woodlands; wild glens and chasms; and in the distance far-off mountains rising in serried ridges; the Leicester Hills on the west; the chain of ponds, Patch's, Coes, stretching along the westerly edge of the farm.

For untold generations the Nipmuck Indians had raised corn and squash on this flat, rich land at the foot of the Leicester Hills, snared game in the uplands and caught fish in the streams. They knew full well that it was deep and fat soil. Their village was located in the hills to the west; the Tataessit Indians led by Sagamore Solomon. Little evidence remains of the occupation of this area by the Indians. Even the exact location of their villages is uncertain. Their trails have been lost. Their frail structures have disappeared. The only tangible evidence that the Indians once cultivated this site are the stone implements, arrowheads and bits of broken pottery found in the soil. Mrs. Margaret Lincoln Marey, daughter of Mr. Winslow Sever Lincoln, has a vivid memory of a

large box of Indian relics kept in the cellar of the farmhouse, which her grandfather had gathered on the farm.

The Red Man's occupancy of this broken-up land was doomed. Events were taking place thousands of miles away which were to drive him from the land he had held for untold generations. King Henry VII, first of the Tudor line, had commissioned John Cabot to sail West and John Cabot claimed all America for the English king. And all the Tudors claimed this land, and the early Stuarts. The Puritans were a problem for handsome Charles I, and, glad to get rid of them, he granted a charter in 1628 to the Massachusetts Bay Company and title to all the land three miles north of the Merrimack and three miles south of the Charles and west by northwest to the sea.

Nearer crept the white man. The settlement of Boston in 1630 was quickly followed by the founding of towns in the interior. For a generation after the Puritans founded Boston nothing is recorded regarding the territory which is now Worcester.

The first grant of land in what is now Worcester was made in 1657 to Increase Nowell of Charlestown, Secretary of the Commonwealth. Five years later, one thousand acres were granted to the Church at Malden for the use of the ministry. In 1664, 250 acres were assigned to Ensign Thomas Noyes, of Sudbury. Not until 1673 were actual settlers enlisted in sufficient numbers to warrant making a plantation. Daniel Gookin negotiated with the Indians for the purchase of their lands. On July 13, 1674, he bought from them a tract of land eight miles square for which he paid twelve pounds of the lawful money of New England.

King Philip's War in 1675 forced the settlers to abandon their homes. A second settlement was abandoned for the same reason. The third and successful attempt was made in 1713. Jonas Rice, first permanent settler of Worcester, settled on Sagatabscot Hill. His brother, Gershom, soon followed him, followed shortly by Nathaniel Moore and Daniel Heywood. At the same time the General Court of the Bay Colony placed the authority to settle here in a group of men who were designated the "Proprietors of Worcester."

Daniel Heywood was one of these proprietors. The proprietors were assigned lots. A map showing the allotment of these lots was drawn by the late Ellery B. Crane and shows that the area which

later became the Lincoln Farm was assigned to Daniel Heywood. The Heywoods were large landowners in early Worcester. The records of the proprietors show that Daniel Heywood was granted forty acres in lots of ten acres each in the first apportionment and acquired further large tracts within the limits of Worcester. The Worcester County Abstract Company possesses the chain of titles to the land which later became the Lincoln Farm. The first link in the long chain was Daniel Heywood.

Daniel Heywood was born in Concord, April 18, 1696; came to Worcester in 1714. He resided on the site of the present Bay State House, where he, his son and grandson of the same name kept a hotel for nearly a century. For over fifty years he was a Deacon of the Old South Church. He served as Town Clerk and on the Board of Selectmen. Heywood died in 1773, was buried in the Village Burying Ground, now the Worcester Common. On the plan of this burying ground his lot is numbered 153. It is located near the Soldiers' Monument.

There were then no roads leading west with the exception of Hardwick Road, now Pleasant Street. So it seems highly probable that Daniel Heywood did not cultivate what is now the site of the Teachers College. As recorded in Book No. 81 and page 552 in the Registry of Deeds, Daniel Heywood on March 20, 1766, sold this land to Asa Moore, blacksmith, for forty pounds. It is interesting to note that Gardner and John Chandler, distinguished members of the family which later gave its name to the street which passes the State Teachers College, were witnesses to this deed.

Asa Moore was a man of considerable prominence in Worcester during the troubled years before and during the Revolution. In the Worcester Town Records, 1754-1763, appears this item: "Voted that a school be kept in the same way and manner as they were last year and that John Chandler, Jun^r & Tim. Paine Esq. and Mr. Asa Moore be a committee to provide a master for ye centre School." He served on the Worcester Committee of Correspondence along with Nathan Baldwin and Levi Lincoln, Sr.

On June 24, 1769, Asa Moore sold his farm to John Moore, his son. A map of early Worcester shows John Moore owning a large tract of land bounded by Patch's Pond on the west, to what is now May Street on the east and Pleasant Street on the north. Like his father, John Moore was a prominent citizen of Worcester.

The next proprietor of this land was Gideon Paine who on April 12, 1813, bought it from John Moore. Isaiah Thomas witnessed the deed.

Up to this time, 1813, there is no record of any buildings located on the tract of land. There has been a controversy over the age of the small house now located at the westerly junction of Chandler and May Streets. Some local historians have insisted that it is the oldest house, or one of the oldest, in Worcester. The evidence seems to point to a comparatively recent building of this house. The first mention of buildings erected on the site of the Lincoln Farm is in the transfer of this property by Gideon Paine to Isaac Davis on September 1, 1854. On that date Charles Hersey, executor of the will of Gideon Paine, sold to Isaac Davis the farm of seventy-two acres situated on May Street and all the buildings. Miss Holbrook, of Sutton, Massachusetts, was present at the May, 1942, meeting of the Worcester Historical Society when this paper was read. She stated that her grandfather was born in this house in the year 1841. Furthermore, there were no streets connecting this region with the main arteries of traffic until May Street was laid out in 1827. Of course this does not exclude dirt roads connecting Main and Pleasant streets. Beginning in 1849 Chandler Street was extended from Main to Irving Street; to Park Avenue in 1856; and from Park Avenue to Tatnuck Square in 1869. The evidence points to the building of this house by Gideon Paine. It was standing on the site of the present building of the State Teachers College when William Sever Lincoln bought the farm from one Isaac Davis.

Isaac Davis held many parcels of property in Worcester. A study of the deeds recorded in the Worcester County Court House reveals that the name of Isaac Davis appears on more deeds than that of any other man in Worcester County. A distinguished citizen of Worcester, he served on the first Board of Aldermen in 1848, and during the years 1856, 1858, and 1861 was Mayor of Worcester. On September 18, 1855, Isaac Davis sold his farm on May Street, seventy-three acres, and the buildings to William Sever Lincoln for \$4,500. For two generations the Lincoln family owned this property. It became known far and wide as the Lincoln or Willow Farm; the Willow Farm because of the huge willow trees which lined May Street.

The story of the Lincoln family begins in Hingham, Mass. In

the year 1637 Samuel Lincoln, of Hingham, England, emigrated and settled in Hingham, Mass. Mr. Waldo Lincoln, of Worcester, a descendant of Samuel, has traced some 3,200 members descended from the first Samuel, among whom were Abraham Lincoln and the distinguished Lincoln family of Worcester. One branch of this family migrated from Hingham to the Western plains, another to Worcester. These two branches crossed in 1848 on the occasion of Abraham Lincoln's visit to Worcester. He was entertained by Levi Lincoln, Jr., in his mansion on Elm Street, but neither realized their descent from a common ancestor.

Levi Lincoln, Sr., was the first of the Worcester Lincolns. He was active during the Revolution serving on the local Committee of Correspondence. Jefferson appointed him Attorney General of the United States, and during the year 1825 he was acting governor of Massachusetts. An active member of the Democratic Republican party he frequently wrote letters to the press attacking the Federalists, signing them "Farmer." The Federalists ridiculed him as Farmer Lincoln. His farm was a model. He introduced improved methods of agriculture and experimented with new breeds of cattle.

Several of his sons were equally distinguished. Enoch became governor of Maine; William, a distinguished historian; a third, Levi, Jr., served nine terms as governor of Massachusetts and was elected first Mayor of Worcester. Four of Levi, Jr.'s children played a prominent part in the history of Worcester—Daniel Waldo Lincoln was elected Mayor of Worcester in 1863 and 1864. His avocation was horticulture. On his farm he grew and exhibited two hundred varieties of pears. In his nursery located at the corner of Linden and Elm Streets, he raised silkworms and here he built a large tank in which to grow aquatic plants. For many years Edward Winslow Lincoln was Secretary of the Worcester Horticultural Society. He was the founder of the public park system of the United States. A third son, Captain George Lincoln, was killed in the Battle of Buena Vista. With a fourth son, William Sever Lincoln, this paper is especially concerned.

William Sever Lincoln was born in Worcester in the year 1811. Soon after his graduation from Bowdoin College he practiced law in Millbury, Massachusetts. He then moved to Alton, Illinois, where he became a Circuit Judge. He returned to Worcester in 1844. In 1855 he bought from Isaac Davis the farm which for two generations was a Worcester landmark.

Aided by his father, ex-Governor Levi Lincoln, Jr., he built the farmhouse fronting May Street and the great barns and ice house. The timbers were hand hewn. Most of the trees—maple, hemlock, oak and pine, which added beauty and lent distinction to the farm—were planted by Mr. Lincoln.

At that time Tatnuck was wholly a farming community. There were only twelve houses from Newton Square to Tatnuck. The Wetherell Farm was located at Newton Square and extended to Chandler Street; the Chamberlain farmhouse near Chamberlain Parkway, was built about the year 1825 by Andrew MacFarland; to the south Mr. Lincoln's neighbor was Jonas Hartshorn. Another neighbor was Amasa Southwick living at the corner of Mill and Chandler Streets. Mrs. Lincoln undoubtedly visited the Micah Johnson house on Mill Street, where Mrs. Johnson is said to have woven the first rag carpets in the United States. Rags to be woven into carpets were brought to her from great distances. The Gates farmhouse, still standing, was located opposite what is now the Tatnuck Church and, below, near Tatnuck Square, was located the Elkanah Rich farm. Slavery was the great problem in the days when the Lincoln farmhouse was built. The Liberty Farm house, built by Daniel Kimball, was then occupied by Stephen and Abbie Kelly Foster, famous abolitionists. And Mr. Lincoln was not unmindful of the slavery controversy. The George Newton house is one of the oldest landmarks at Tatnuck Square. It was built during the Revolution and for many years was kept as an Inn. Mr. Benjamin Flagg maintained it as a tavern of the old type. Archibald Willard maintained the famous Willard Tavern. The stagecoaches stopped there to change horses on their homeward trip from Boston to Paxton and Barre. This tavern was located where the Tatnuck School now stands. Here the neighborly farmers dropped in, and over a friendly mug of flip talked crops and politics; drank a toast to John Brown and discussed the fateful election of 1860. And among them were the Lincolns. There is a famous spring in Tatnuck, known as Silver Springs. For many years Mr. Charles Boynton, owner of Silver Springs, invited his neighbors to a general picnic on Bunker Hill Day. The land was cleared for croquet grounds and sports in general. Swings were erected for the children. Eminent speakers, among whom was Mr. William Sever Lincoln, recalled the glories of June 17, 1775. In this dignified, hos-

pitabile and cultured neighborhood Mr. Lincoln settled down to farming. Scarcely, however, was he settled in his new home when the Civil War broke out.

From a boy William Sever Lincoln had been interested in military affairs. He had served as Captain of the Worcester Light Infantry. It is interesting to note that Levi Lincoln in 1803 wrote the application to Governor Strong which led to the formation of the Worcester Light Infantry. John Waldo Lincoln, son of Levi Lincoln, Sr., was Captain of this Company in the War of 1812. Daniel Waldo Lincoln had served as Captain, as well as Levi and Winslow Sever Lincoln, sons of William Sever Lincoln. When the Civil War broke out Mr. Lincoln enlisted and served throughout the War. He was wounded, taken prisoner, escaped—an adventurous story—and for his services he was brevetted Brigadier General. On his return he carried on farming until his death in 1889.

Winslow Sever Lincoln succeeded his father as owner of the farm. His four children were magnets for the children of the neighborhood—picnics, the bridle path, the hickory nuts in the fall, the chestnuts on the giant tree on the hill near the Hartshorn farm; quail and partridge, the fields of windswept daisies, the colorful Hicks gypsies, who lived on the shores of Coes Pond, the skating parties on Patch's Pond, the furry folk, the raucous call of the crow, the clarion call of the oriole—memories.

True to the military tradition of his family, Winslow Sever Lincoln was commissioned Captain of the Worcester Light Infantry and served in the Spanish-American War. The hardships which he endured led to his death, which occurred in 1902.

His widow, Helen Blake Weber Lincoln, maintained the farm until 1918 when she moved to California to live with her son. Mrs. Lincoln was born in Chicago in the year 1858, daughter of Captain John Weber and Lydia McClellan Blake. Later she moved to Worcester, living with her aunt, Mrs. Edmund Barton. She attended the Worcester Normal School, graduating in the second class. For a few years she taught school. At the turn of the century women in politics were a novelty. In 1896 the city was divided into eight wards. One of the School Board members from Ward Eight was Mr. Frank Hayden, who died in office. Mrs. Lincoln was elected to fill out this unexpired term, and re-elected for a second three-year term, which expired in 1902. Perhaps because she owned a

horse and buggy, she was assigned as visitor to such widely separated schools as Abbott, Burncoat, Greendale, Northville, and Tattuck schools. Her interests were many. She was an outstanding member of the Shakespeare Club. Her beautiful voice reading *As You Like It* or the tragedy of *Hamlet* is remembered to this day.

The farmhouse was not occupied after the year 1918. Worcester citizens will long remember the red farmhouse, the large barn where at one time seventy-five head of cattle were kept, the stable, the shed for the wagons, the huge silo, the two-hundred-foot greenhouse, the ice house on the edge of the pond, the small building for cooling milk, the dog churn for churning butter, kept in motion by two large Newfoundland dogs.

For many years the Worcester Normal School had been seeking a new site. A beautiful site originally, the district surrounding its school had become congested. Agitation for a new site led to the selection of a Committee, headed by Superintendent Walter S. Young of the Worcester Public Schools. The present site of the State Teachers College was finally chosen. It was purchased in 1930 by the city of Worcester from Mr. George Rockwood, and presented by the city to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

Mr. Rockwood was the last private owner of the Lincoln Farm. For years he had made his home on May Street in the house now owned by Dr. Benjamin Alton. As time went on he added to his original holdings. In 1916 he purchased the Lincoln Farm.

And now the final chapter in this long story. Mr. Rockwood sold to the city of Worcester nearly twenty acres, west of the College grounds. He had already given to the city a park, of about thirteen acres. To the south of the College grounds houses were creeping up Hartshorn Hill. Between this hill and the College grounds was a tract of land consisting of thirty acres and owned by Mr. Rockwood. If it were cut up into house lots the beautiful setting of the College would be destroyed. The friends of the College were fearful. But during the spring of 1942, Mr. Rockwood expressed the desire to grant this land to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. It would protect the College from being surrounded by "dog houses."

It was arranged that the deed to this land should be presented to the Commissioner of Education, Walter F. Downey, on the morning of Commencement, June 12, 1942. President Clinton C.

Carpenter of the Worcester State Teachers College introduced Mr. Rockwood, who expressed his satisfaction in deeding thirty acres of valuable land to the Commonwealth. "The Commonwealth takes, it is a pleasure for me to give." So ends the story of the legal transaction.

It is a story of local annals, full of little things; names, dates, and facts. The legal transfers have been numerous. But deeds do not constitute ownership—who owns this land?

The giant oak, to the south of the College, a sapling when Worcester was founded, which has bowed before a thousand storms, owns it; the feathered folk own it, the quarrelsome blue jays, the crows in twos and threes, the song sparrows, the meadow larks, the bell-like tones of the vesper sparrow, the pheasants hidden deep; the furry folk own it, the chattering squirrels, the furtive chipmunks; the flowers own it; the fields of white and yellow daisies bending in the wind; the mists own it, the sun and the stars, the winds and the storms.

"REQUIESCAT IN PACE"